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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000655

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FROM US MISSION TO UNESCO

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SUBJECT: USUNESCO: AMBASSADOR GROSS MEETS DIRECTOR GENERAL

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Classified by: PAO Caitlin Bergin for reasons 1.4 B/D

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Ambassador David A. Gross, U.S. Coordinator for International Communications and Information Policy in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs and U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO, Louise V. Oliver met with UNESCO's Director General Koichiro Matsuura and Assistant Director General for Communication and Information Abdul Waheed Khan, on January 20, 2006 to discuss World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) follow up. During the meeting, Ambassador Gross, referring to the language of the Tunis Agenda adopted at WSIS, stated that the U.S.'s strong view was that "enhanced cooperation" meant rededication to the existing work of the international community. He noted the Canadian support of Markus Kumar for the new Internet Governance Forum (IGF) secretariat. He emphasized that the U.S. had finished negotiating the issue of Internet governance at WSIS and described the IGF as a place to exchange information. He noted that UNESCO's constituency, particularly media freedom NGOs, could play a useful role in advancing UNESCO's interests at the IGF. Ambassadors Gross and Oliver stated that during talks with over 25 Ambassadors to UNESCO, they had detected a shift away from advocating new mechanisms on ICTs toward constructive use to advance common interests. Ambassador Gross reaffirmed USG views on the importance of access to foreign languages on the Internet. Matsuura took his views on board and appeared to welcome a potential chance to mend the USG-UNESCO rift over cultural diversity. END SUMMARY.

ENHANCED COOPERATION AND THE ROLE OF THE IGF

12. (SBU) Ambassador Gross delivered a strong message that the U.S. had finished negotiating the issue of internet governance at WSIS and it was now time to move on. "Enhanced cooperation" in this context, he said, meant re-dedicating ourselves to existing organizations within the UN system. No new work programs, no expansions of mandates and no new mechanisms were established at Tunis, he said, adding that this was good news for UNESCO's budget. He noted that he had discussed with Khan Canada's support of Markus Kumar to lead the new Internet Governance Forum (IGF) secretariat in Geneva. At the same time, he emphasized

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that the U.S. was not playing a major role in deciding the IGF's secretariat.

UNESCO AND MEDIA FREEDOM

13. (SBU) Ambassador Gross praised UNESCO's commitment to media freedom throughout the WSIS process. He encouraged Matsuura to motivate UNESCO's media freedom NGO constituency to take an active stakeholder role at the IGF, and specifically mentioned the World Press Freedom Committee as an example of the kind of NGO that might play a constructive role on the IGF. Matsuura indicated that he would consider this point.

ICT DEBATE: UNESCO AMBASSADORS WANT TO MOVE ON

14. (SBU) Ambassador Oliver noted that Ambassador Gross had met with almost thirty Ambassadors to UNESCO to discuss ICTs and WSIS. Gross stated that while the U.S. might still be working through some of the Internet governance issues with some EU colleagues, he saw that the rest of the world wanted to move on and look at the constructive application of ICTs to advance common interests. Gross also discussed the views of African Ambassadors to UNESCO, which were focused on how to use ICTs as a tool to help provide government

services such as health care, policing and education. Matsuura mentioned the role that the private sector could play in this regard and stated that despite initial criticism, UNESCO's Communication and Information sector continued to push ahead for greater cooperation with U.S. companies such as Microsoft and Intel. The WSIS Action Line of ICTs and Education, he added, was a main theme for UNESCO, and the organization itself could help the developing world in this regard.

Local languages on the Internet

15. (U) Matsuura stated that UNESCO was opening multimedia community centers in developing countries and had established an international institute for capacity building in Addis Ababa. He added that capacity building was a WSIS Action Line in UNESCO's competency. Ambassador Gross cited the importance of expanding the Internet for non-ASCII languages and stated that the USG strongly supported access to content in local languages on the Internet. Matsuura and Khan agreed.

16. (C) COMMENT: During the meeting, Matsuura was all smiles. At the same time, it is often worth noting what he does not mention. He only raised 2 of the 8 WSIS Action Lines for follow up - capacity building, and ICTs and Education - suggesting that worker bees in the Secretariat who want to act aggressively on all 8 Action Lines (including information ethics) might be held in check. While appearing receptive to the idea, Matsuura did not specifically state he agreed with Canada's support for having the IGF's Secretariat in Geneva, as ADG Khan had (see reftel). A Matsuura staffer later stated that the two main points Matsuura had heard from Gross were that Internet Governance was "a dead issue" and ICTs are tools that do not have value independent of application. ("If we are going to meet and talk about computers, why not meet and talk about pencils?" she asked.) She stated that Gross delivered a strong message that the IGF would change nothing in terms of policy, but that UNESCO should urge its media freedom constituency to play an active role. What had resonated most with Matsuura, she said, was that Gross made clear that other UNESCO member states shared USG views on his points. Mission will now wait to see whether Matsuura will support the Swiss proposal for the IGF, continue to distance UNESCO from Internet Governance, and keep UNESCO focused on one or two WSIS Action lines where it can have impact. We hear over and over again from member states that education remains a top UNESCO priority and therefore we can expect continued emphasis on the use of ICTs and education, particularly in rural areas. END COMMENT.

17. (U) Ambassador Gross has cleared on this cable.

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